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ABSTRACT

This "report card" grades the state of education, health, special needs services, and economic security among Illinois children in 1993. Illinois ranked 38th out of the 50 states in financial contribution per student for education, but had a high disparity in revenues per pupil at the county level, thus earning a "D+" grade for education. Nearly 1 in 7 Illinois children had no health insurance, and 28 states had lower infant mortality rates, giving the state a "D" in regard to child health. Of the state's special needs children, nearly 1 in 8 had been born to an unwed teenage mother lacking a high school diploma, and the number of children in foster care in 1993 had doubled since 1985, giving the state a "D-" grade for special needs. In Illinois nearly 1 in 10 families lived in poverty, and the state's Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments were way below the national average, giving the state an "F" grade for economic security. Overall, the state received a "D-" grade for how it cared for the children of Illinois. The Kids First Agenda recommends that the state increase its support for education, adopt a comprehensive health care delivery system for children and families, adopt improved family preservation programs, and increase state AFDC payments and job training programs for low-income single-parent households. (MDM)

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Illinois Kids Count

1993 Report Card

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EDUCATION

A child's surest path to personal growth, responsible citizenship and economic well-being is a quality education. For young children who need extra help, preschool is a proven preparation for later classroom success. The growing demands of the workplace make the benefits of education a necessity for each child.

Counties that had inadequate per-pupil spending levels

The Illinois story

Illinois ranks 38th out of the 50 states in financial contribution per student for education. The state plunged from 7th in the nation to 44th in adjusted per capita spending on education from 1978 to 1988.

Statewide, about 58,000 children were enrolled in state and federally funded preschool. This is 11% of all state children in this age group.

D+

The county picture

The highest average amount spent per pupil in 1992 was $5,877 in Cook County. The lowest average was $3,459 in Macoupin County.

Disparities among counties in per pupil revenues are significant, but mask even wider disparities among school districts within many counties. Within Cook County, for instance, districts' funding ranged from a high of over $11,000 to a low of about $3,000 per student.

Early intervention programs for young children with delays in speech, physical ability, or thinking skills have a proven record of enhancing these children's development.

Only 14% of the 56,000 children statewide from birth to age three who need help because of serious developmental delays get the early intervention services they need.

The state should provide adequate funding for full implementation of early intervention services over the next five years.

Kids First Agenda

1. **The state must increase its support in an equitable manner so each school district is guaranteed a basic level funding, such as the benchmark recommended by the Legislative Task Force on School Finance.**

2. **Early childhood education is the foundation for success. Illinois must increase funding for state-funded preschool in coordination with the federal Head Start program until every qualified child is served, while not sacrificing quality.**

3. **Illinois should guarantee access to quality special education programs by additional appropriations that help local districts pay for special education mandates.**

HEALTH

Affordable medical care in Illinois is critical. All children, regardless of family income, race or area of residence, require periodic medical attention to thrive. Good health care that begins before a child is born saves lives and money, and reduces later health problems.

The Illinois story

About 1 child in 7 has no health insurance.

More than 1 in 5 mothers received no first trimester prenatal care.

Almost half of Illinois' rural counties have no hospitals with obstetrical services.

78 of every 1,000 newborns were low birth weight babies — an 8% increase over 1980.

28 states have a better rate of infant mortality. In Illinois, 10,546 children died before their first birthday between 1987 and 1991.

Counties that had an increase in low birth weight babies

D

The county picture

57 out of 102 counties saw improvement in the number of births with early prenatal care between 1980 and 1991. Greene County made the most significant gains—a 38% increase, while Saline County lost the most ground—a 16% decrease.

A 1987 health professional shortage survey done by the Illinois Department of Public Health notes Scott County had the greatest shortage of family practitioners, with 12,200 people per family practitioner.

47 counties saw a worsening in the rate of low birth weight babies between 1980 and 1991, while 26 counties saw an improvement.

Kids First Agenda

1. **Illinois should adopt a comprehensive plan for providing health services to low- and moderate-income children and families uncovered by private health insurance or Medicaid.**

2. **To expand access to care, Medicaid and other publicly funded health plans should pay for the services of qualified professionals such as midwives and nurse practitioners.**

3. **The state should improve access to immunizations and primary care.**

SPECIAL NEEDS

Far too many Illinois children are facing abuse, neglect and separation from their families. Economic hardship, drugs and other social problems are hurting more and more families. Already overburdened family support programs are unequipped to keep pace with this increasing need.

Counties that had an increase in foster care placements

New families headed by teen mothers who are unwed and lack a high school diploma are particularly at risk. In 1991, about 1 in 8 first births (13%) were to Illinois mothers who fit this description. Nationally, the rate is 11%.

These new families at risk appear in significant numbers in both rural and urban counties. Cook County, the state's most populous, shows 15% of new families fitting this description. In rural Marion County, the figure is 17%.

Each of these risks increases the chances that families will break up, be poor, or be dependent on public assistance. Illinois must expand efforts to increase high school graduation rates and programs that support teens' efforts to get training and jobs.

D-

The Illinois story

The number of children in foster care in Illinois in 1992— 31,480 at midyear — has more than doubled since 1985.

Only 17 out of 102 counties saw any decrease in their foster care population.

37,402 Illinois children were confirmed as suffering neglect or abuse. Fourteen percent of these cases were sexual abuse; 38% were physical and other abuses; and 48% were neglect.

The county picture

No county is free from problems of child abuse and neglect. Rural Fulton County had a victim rate of 24 per 1,000 children in 1992, while urban Cook County had a rate of 13 per 1,000 children.

Several counties had sharp increases in the foster care population between 1985 and 1992. Urban Champaign County saw a 288% increase during this time; rural Henry County saw a 111% increase.

Kids First Agenda

1. **Illinois should continue to help children and troubled families through improved family preservation programs.**
2. **Illinois must provide comprehensive health care, quality education and prompt and meaningful support to foster children, and expand financial support and training for foster parents.**
3. **The state should fully implement all court-ordered child welfare reforms.**
4. **The Juvenile Court Act should be revised to reflect a more integrated and effective response to the escalating number of child abuse and neglect cases.**

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Poverty can harm a child's healthy development and academic performance. The growing number of families headed by women generally are poorer than two-parent and single-male headed families. Our state pays an enormous price in lost productivity when families are not given an opportunity to achieve economic stability.

The Illinois story

Nearly 1 out of 10 families live in poverty — 57% of these families are headed by single women, an increase of 7% over 1979.

Illinois' Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments are well below the national average. The maximum AFDC payment for a family of three is $367 a month.

In many urban and rural parts of the state, rents for even a one-bedroom apartment exceed the monthly AFDC payment.

20% of all households pay excessive housing costs — over 30% of income. Of people earning under $20,000 annually, 62% pay excessive housing costs — 73% of these are renters.

Counties with a decrease in median family income

F

The county picture

In urban St. Clair County, 69% of all poor families are headed by single women.

95% of counties had an increase in the number of children receiving AFDC between 1980 and 1991.

There is a great variation in median family income among counties, with a top median family income of $52,308 in Lake County, and a low of $19,399 in Alexander County.

In Fulton County, the median family income fell 17% between 1978 and 1989. In McHenry County, median family income rose 7%.

77% percent of low-income renters in urban areas and 60% in rural areas pay excessive housing costs.

Kids First Agenda

1. **Currently only 10% of mothers who receive AFDC payments are able to enroll in AFDC job-training programs. At a minimum, Illinois should match untapped federal job-training funds.**
2. **Illinois must make work pay for families making the transition from welfare. This requires extending health care, child care and education benefits to welfare recipients who take low-income jobs.**
3. **AFDC payments must rise. Combined benefits from AFDC and food stamps should bring families at least up to the federal poverty level.**
4. **The state should reduce excessive state and local tax burdens on low-income working parents. One remedy is to adopt state earned income tax credits and a graduated income tax system.**
5. **Affordable housing for low-income and poor families must be increased.**

OVERALL GRADE

Last year, Voices for Illinois Children gave the state a grade of D-minus in how it cares for its children. The state's low grade was a call to action. Hundreds of individuals from around the state joined the Kids First Action Network to work with us to ensure that the state does all it can to achieve higher grades in the future.

This year, the grade is again a D-minus.

We've analyzed data from every county in the state, and concluded that kids are simply not a priority. They will remain the state's poorest and most neglected age group unless we turn promises and attention into concrete improvements.

This means our work is cut out for us. While parents bear primary responsibility for meeting the needs of their children, in the final analysis all Illinois children are "our kids." Schools, service and religious organizations and other community institutions have a vital role to play. The private sector can help by fostering family-friendly policies in the workplace and beyond.

The state, just as it allocates vast resources to repair roads and bridges, must pay attention when the human infrastructure is falling apart around us. Today's children are the bridge to our future.

D-

Voices for Illinois Children champions the full development of every child in Illinois. Special emphasis is placed on those children who live in poverty or are vulnerable because of discrimination, ill health, or family stress.

Voices is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group that addresses problems faced by Illinois children and their families. Through research, public education and coalition-building, Voices generates support from civic, business and community leaders for cost-effective and practical proposals to improve the lives of Illinois' children. Our *Kids First Agenda* provides a blueprint for positive steps Illinois can take to increase opportunities for children and families.

This booklet is a summary of a complete briefing book titled *Illinois Kids Count: Imagine the Possibilities*, which contains detailed information about children in each county. The *Kids Count* project is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

This publication was made possible in part by a grant from Kraft General Foods and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

For more information, or for copies of this brochure, call Voices at (312) 456-0600.

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Homework Assignment -

1. For Governor Jim Edgar, Senators Pate Phillip and Emil Jones, Representatives Mike Madigan, Lee Daniels, and the Illinois General Assembly: enact the *Kids First Agenda*.

2. For you: join Voices and help carry out the Kids First Agenda. Become a member of our *Kids First Action Network*.

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